

SERMON XIX.

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HOW OUGHT WE TO DO OUR DUTY TOWARD OTHERS, THOUGH
THEY DO NOT THEIRS TOWARD US ?

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.—Romans xii. 21.

WHEN God first made the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, looking back upon his work, as taking delight in it, He “saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” (Gen. i. 31.) There was an excellent order and sweet harmony every where: all the creatures above and below, making then but one “host,” (Gen. ii. 1,) did conspire to glorify their Creator, and be beneficial one to another: so that if man had stood in his integrity, the earth would have been a kind of heaven to him. But when he put forth his hand to take and eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which alone, of all the great variety, was forbidden him; an inundation of sin and misery broke in upon him and all his posterity. For, from that one sin of his, there sprung in a little time a far greater number of sins, than persons out of his loins; one sin still begetting another, and that another, till, in a while, “the earth was filled with violence.” (Gen. vi. 11.) God, not willing to leave things in this woful state, designed a renovation by a second Adam, a Reconciler, one that should be our peace both with God and one another, that there might be peace above and peace below restored again.

There were two songs sung to this purpose: the one, at Christ’s coming into the world; the other, as he was about to depart out of it: the former, by “a multitude of the heavenly host, saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace;” the latter, by “the whole multitude of the disciples, saying, Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.” (Luke ii. 13, 14; xix. 37, 38.)

The subordinate means of reconciliation is the gospel, called “the word of reconciliation,” (2 Cor. v. 19,) and “the gospel of peace.” (Eph. vi. 15.) This is the great engine in the hand of God to bring men powerfully, yet sweetly, to God and one another. There are no arguments so powerful to persuade to holiness toward God and righteousness toward men, as those drawn from gospel-grace. “The grace of God that bringeth salvation,” will teach a man those lessons which can never be truly learned otherwise:—to “live soberly, righteously, and godly.” (Titus ii. 11, 12.)

Therefore our apostle, like a wise master-builder, in his epistles usually, as may be seen particularly in those to the Ephesians and

Colossians, lays a good foundation for gospel-obedience in the grace thereof. He first sets forth the great mystery of redemption by Jesus Christ, and the grace of God therein; and then concludes with exhortation to all duties, both to God and man, from the consideration thereof.

He doth the like here in this to the Romans: for, having, in the foregoing part of the epistle, convinced both Jew and Gentile, and "concluded all under sin," and showed the only way to justification to be by the grace of God through Jesus Christ, he comes in this and the following chapters to engage them to their duty both to God and man. See how he doeth it: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Verse 1.) "Your bodies;" that is, yourselves, souls and bodies; the body being put by a synecdoche for the whole man. He expresseth both elsewhere, as due to God upon the account of redeeming love: "Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. vi. 20.) He exhorts them to many excellent duties in this chapter; upon all which, the word "therefore" (verse 1) hath a powerful influence. Although the duty here exhorted to in the last verse, be so high that it is not easy to reach unto it; namely, "not to be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good;" yet the consideration of "the mercies of God," mentioned above, will make this appear to be but a "reasonable service."

The point of doctrine from this text is:—

DOCTRINE.

That every Christian should not only take heed, that he be not overcome of evil, but endeavour, what in him lieth, to overcome evil with good.

It divides itself into two branches:—

I. *Every Christian should take heed that he be not overcome of evil.*

II. *Every Christian ought to endeavour, what in him lieth, to overcome evil with good.*

We shall speak a little to each of these in order, and make the application of both together; which done, you will see *how we ought to do our duty toward others, though they do not theirs toward us.* I begin with the first:—

BRANCH I. *Every Christian should take heed that he be not overcome of evil.*—By "evil," understand any unkind or injurious dealing from others; which may be,

1. By detaining or withdrawing from us the love, or the fruits thereof, which by the will of God are due to us, either as men, or men standing in such or such a special relation to them. Or,

2. By speaking or doing that to us or against us, which the law of love, or the special relation wherein we stand unto them, forbids.

"To be overcome of evil," is to be drawn by the evil temper or

carriage of another toward us, to be of the like temper or carriage toward him; to be so provoked by an injury done unto us as to return the like again. As, when two contraries are put together,—suppose, fire and water,—that which brings the other to its temper is said to “master and overcome” it; so, when another’s malice toward us cools our love to him, and brings us to the like evil disposition toward him, our love may be said to be “overcome” by his malice. And great reason there is, that we should take heed that we be not overcome of evil,

1. *If we consider what relics of corruption there are in good men.*—We live not among angels, but men compassed about with many infirmities, which will be apt to make them sometimes offensive to us. When the scer came to Asa with a message from God, because it was that which did not please him, “he was wroth and in a rage with him, and put him in prison:” (2 Chron. xvi. 7—10:) a strange act of a good king! Yet so he was; for the scripture testifies of him, that “nevertheless Asa’s heart was perfect with the Lord all his days.” (1 Kings xv. 14.) Aaron, “the saint of the Lord,” (as he is called, Psalm cvi. 16,) and Miriam, are found chiding with Moses, their brother. (Num. xii. 1.) Two of the most eminent preachers of the gospel of peace, Paul and Barnabas, are at variance; and “the contention is so sharp between them, that they depart asunder one from the other.” (Acts xv. 39.) So true was that saying of theirs to the men of Lystra, who, seeing a miracle wrought by them, were about to do sacrifice, as if they had been gods: “Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you.” (Acts xiv. 15.)

Sin is a troublesome thing, and will not suffer him in whom it is to be at rest, or any that are near to it or about it. One would think that if any men in the world were like to have been free from disturbing passions, the disciples of Christ and Moses should be the men, whose masters taught and practised meekness to that degree as no man ever did the like: yet we find, that such as were brought up under their wings had their infirmities and disturbing passions, as well as others. Joshua, Moses’s servant, hearing that Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp, is disturbed himself, and endeavours to disturb Moses about the matter, and would have had him disturb them: “My lord Moses, forbid them.” But he checks his passion, and calms his spirit, by wishing there were more of them: “Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets!” (Num. xi. 28, 29.) The like you find in Christ’s own disciples, even in John, who lay in his bosom. He comes to Christ, saying, “Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us.” They would have had Christ, it is like, join with them in the prohibition; but he forbids them to forbid him, saying, “He that is not against us is on our part.” (Mark ix. 38—40.) So that, you see, you may find enough from good men to exercise you so far as to try the strength of all your graces.

2. *Beside this, you will find in some a rooted enmity to that which is good.*—There are two spirits, by one of which all the men in the

world are led,—“the spirit of the world,” and “the spirit which is of God.” (1 Cor. ii. 12.) These two spirits, being contrary one to the other, do lead two contrary ways. They have striven long, and will strive as long as they breathe. The contrariety of these two spirits first appeared in Cain and Abel, and hath continued down along through all generations unto this day, and will do so hereafter. It is like the “war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam,—all their days.” (1 Kings xiv. 30.) The hatred of the Philistines against Israel is called by the prophet, “the old hatred,” (Ezek. xxv. 15,) not only because they were always full of spite against them, but because it was of the same nature as that of old to the people of God.

This “old hatred” is not likely, by “waxing old, to vanish away,” as the old covenant is said to do. (Heb. viii. 13.) It was under the old administration, and appeared against the holy prophets then: “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?” (Acts vii. 52.) And it continued to show itself against Christ, who gave his disciples warning to expect the same, under the new administration: “If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?” (Matt. x. 25.) And he tells them, “Men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.” (Matt. v. 11.) How this was verified, the scripture first, and ecclesiastical history afterward, do abundantly show. The apostle tells us, they were “reviled, persecuted, defamed,” and “made as the filth of the earth, and the offscouring of all things.” (1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.) And in after-times one would wonder,—had not John said, “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you,” (1 John iii. 13,)—that a people so holy, so good, so peaceable and inoffensive, as the primitive Christians were, should be so unworthily dealt with, both by tongue and hand, as they were. Their adversaries reported that they fed upon man’s flesh, that they practised lewdness in their assemblies, and that they were the authors of all the tumults in those days, and what not? “All manner of evil,” but “falsely;” yet by this means great persecutions were raised against them. And if Christians will be Christians still, they will find the world to be the world still; * so that, unless they be more careful, they will be in danger to be “overcome of evil.” For if they find it hard sometimes not to be overcome of the lesser evil of good men, how will they not be overcome by the greater of bad men? “If the footmen weary them, how will they contend with horses?” (Jer. xii. 5.)

3. *There is something in every man that makes him more easy to be overcome.*—Malice, and other “foolish and hurtful lusts” and “roots of bitterness,” that lie deep in the heart of every man by nature. You see how early they will be putting forth even in children themselves. Revenge is a lesson that every child hath at his fingers’ end. The more to blame are they who, being conversant about them,

* “Such enemies have they (Christians) had in all ages; and in these our days the same is practised, and will be to the world’s end.”—PERKINS On the Creed.

do teach and prompt them to use their hands to avenge themselves on persons or things, before they be able to use their tongues to that or any other purpose. And as they grow up, they "live in" them,— "in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." (Titus iii. 3.) This is found so common a thing among men, that Joseph's brethren thought it almost impossible that he should not hate them for the evil [which] they had done to him. Therefore, when their father was dead, they say, "Joseph will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him." (Gen. l. 15.) And so it is likely he might, if God had not taught him another lesson: "But he giveth more grace." (James iv. 5, 6.)

Yet seeing grace is imperfect in the best of men on earth, it behoveth them to take heed lest they "be overcome of evil." Grace, so far as they have it, makes them strong; but the remainders of corruption make them weak. I have heard that it hath been said of an eminently holy man, that he had grace enough for two men; yet upon some occasions he was found not to have enough for himself.

4. *He that takes not good heed, so as not to be overcome of evil, will be altogether unable to overcome evil with good.*—How can he overcome evil in another, *that is overcome by it himself?* "How wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?" (Matt. vii. 4.) But that we have a farther duty lying upon us than not to be "overcome of evil," comes in the next place to be shown, in speaking to the second branch of the point; which is,

BRANCH II. *Every Christian ought to endeavour, what in him lieth, to overcome evil with good.*—This lesson was not much taught in old time. Our Saviour tells us, the scribes and Pharisees were wont to teach the contrary: "It hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy." (Matt. v. 43.) For which, and other such doctrines as they taught, he calls them, "blind leaders of the blind." (Matt. xv. 14.) The like darkness had blinded the eyes of the old philosophers, for the most part. Some of them, indeed, as Plato and Seneca, have excellent precepts, tending toward the point in hand; but these may be thought to light their candle at their neighbour's torch. Plato was much conversant in, and well acquainted with, the writings of the church of the Jews; and Seneca lived in the days of Paul, and, it is probable, was acquainted with him or with his doctrine, and so might come to a more refined morality.* But these, remaining still in unbelief as to the great doctrines of faith in Jesus Christ, could not see themselves, nor show to others, the true ground of love or the great motives to it.

It was Jesus Christ—who came to reconcile us when enemies, and died for the ungodly, and did with his own mouth preach his own and his Father's love therein—that brought to light such precepts as these: "Love your enemies," (Matt. v. 44,) and, "Overcome evil with good." Not that these were new commandments, brought first into the world when God was "manifest in the flesh." No; they

* Vide GATAKERI *Dissert. de Novi Testamenti Stylo*, cap. 44.

were old commandments. Thus we read: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Lev. xix. 18.) And John, speaking of love, says, "I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning;" (1 John ii. 7;) though in the next verse he calls it "a new commandment," it being renewed by Christ, who may be said to set forth a new edition of it, amplified and enlarged. "A new commandment," says he, "I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another:" (John xiii. 34:) which is such an "as" as no tongue is able fully to express.

In speaking to the point, we shall show,

1. *That every Christian ought to endeavour to overcome evil with good.*

2. *What good means should be used to that purpose.*

3. *How they should be used, that they may be the more effectual to that end.*

1. *That we are to endeavour to overcome evil with good*, doth appear by this:—we are called to "be followers of God," (Eph. v. 1,) and to be of the mind of Christ, (Phil. ii. 5,) and to "follow his steps." (1 Peter ii. 21.) As every godly man is in some measure like unto God, and every true Christian of Christ's mind and way, so he is to endeavour still to be more like to both. Otherwise, to profess godliness and Christianity, is to take the name of God and Christ in vain. The name which God proclaimed as his was, "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." (Exod. xxxiv. 6.) These are attributes which God delights to magnify: he glories in this: "I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness." (Jer. ix. 24.) How often is it said of him, that he is "slow to anger, and of great kindness!" (Neh. ix. 17; Joel ii. 13; Jonah iv. 2.) God did wonderfully exercise these his attributes toward the old world. When "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," (Gen. vi. 5,) how "slow to anger" was he then! He did not presently send the deluge; but his "long-suffering" is said to "wait, while the ark was a-preparing." (1 Peter iii. 20.) And this time of waiting was no less than "one hundred and twenty years." (Gen. vi. 3.) His loving-kindness appeared, also, in that he sent Noah, who "preached righteousness," and called them all this while to repentance. (2 Peter ii. 5.)

The like "long-suffering and great kindness" he exercised toward the people of the Jews, from Egypt, "the house of bondage" from whence he delivered them, to Canaan, and in that good land, which he so freely gave them, too. They were no sooner brought miraculously through the Red Sea, but they began to provoke; and not long after, you may hear God complaining of them, "How long will this people provoke me?" (Num. xiv. 11.) And in verse 22, he says, They "have tempted me now these ten times." Nor were they better after this; for he was then "grieved with" them "forty years long."

(Psalm xcvi. 10.) After the same rate they carried it when they came into Canaan, as you may see by reading the historical books of the Old Testament. You have a short sum of the kindnesses of God to them and their great miscarriages, in the ninth chapter of Nehemiah, where you will find one "yet" after another, and one "nevertheless" after another. God was good to them; "nevertheless" they sin and provoke: they sin and provoke; "nevertheless" God is good to them. (Neh. ix. 26, 30, 31.) The greatness of their sin, and God's great goodness to them, are both set forth in Isai. lxxv. 2, 3: "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts; a people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face." Their sin is here called "rebellion;" which was not only once or twice, but "continually," and that to his very "face." And the goodness of God to them is set out by the "spreading out of his hands;" which showed great desire of their coming-in, and a readiness to embrace them in so doing: and this is said to be not once or twice, but "all the day." That this scripture is to be understood of the Jews, we have the apostle's warrant: "To Israel he saith. All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." (Rom. x. 21.) Thus matters stood between God and them "all the days of old." (Isai. lxiii. 9.)

Neither was God's goodness to them, nor their sin against him, less, when God was manifest in the flesh: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. xxiii. 37.) Their sin was great; they "killed and stoned prophets." It was their fathers' work for many generations; and they take up the same trade, and use it against Christ himself: "Thou that stonest the prophets," in the present tense. They endeavoured to stone Christ himself more than once. (John x. 31.) Now see what good he would have done them notwithstanding, and with what affection: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" He was inwardly moved when he uttered these words. You have the like expression, 2 Sam. xviii. 33: "The king," David, "was much moved, and wept," when he heard of Absalom's death; "and said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!" "How often would I have gathered thee," even every hour of the day, "as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings!" earnestly and affectionately clocking them together, that they might be safe and out of danger. Observe how he carried [it] toward them that would have slain him for curing an impotent man on the sabbath-day. (John v. 16.) He, to abate their fury, speaks many words to them; and at last tells them, "These things I say unto you, that ye might be saved." (Verse 34.) Here is salvation endeavoured, for destruction intended. They would have killed him, but he would have given them life; and, a little after, (verse 40,) he speaks as one bewailing that they would not come to him, that they might have it: "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."

Now if there be such rich goodness in God, there should be, in all that profess his name, an endeavour to be like him, that they may appear to be the children of so good a Father. (Matt. v. 45.) Christ chargeth his disciples to use the best means within their reach to overcome the worst evils [that] they meet with from others: "Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Verse 44.) If such evils as these must be "overcome with good," much more should lesser evils, when they arise, as sometimes they will, from friends or near relations, be "overcome" by the like means. Which brings us to the second thing mentioned; namely,

2. *What good means should be used to this purpose.*—And they are three:—

- (1.) *To do good to them.*
- (2.) *To wish them well, and pray for them.*
- (3.) *To use good words to them and of them.*

Two of these are expressly mentioned by Christ, in the place aforesaid; namely, to "do good to them," and to "pray for them;" and they are all carried in that word, *Ευλογείτε*, "Bless," if it be taken in its largest sense.* When God blesseth men, he always doeth them good: his benediction is a real benefit, because his speaking is doing: "God said, Let there be light: and there was light." (Gen. i. 3.) He said to Abraham, "In blessing I will bless thee;" (Gen. xxii. 17;) that is, "I will surely and certainly do it." So Isaac, speaking of Jacob, says, "I will blessed him; yea, and he shall be blessed." (Gen. xxvii. 33.) And so he was; but not so much because Isaac had said it, as because God had said it before him. For the apostle tells us, that Isaac did bless him "by faith:" (Heb. xi. 20:) now faith must have some word of God to be the ground of it. It was God [who] "spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." (Psalm xxxiii. 9.)

When men are said to "bless," they do it one of these three ways:—

(1.) *By being beneficial to others in yielding or giving to them any good thing that is in their power.*—Thus Jacob calls the present [which] he made to his brother Esau his "blessing;" (Gen. xxxiii. 10, 11;) and Naaman offering Elisha a present, says, "I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant;" (2 Kings v. 15;) and the apostle, speaking to the Corinthians to make up their "bounty" for the poor saints, calls it *ευλογίαν*, their "blessing." (2 Cor. ix. 5.)

(2.) *By wishing them well, and praying for them.*—So Jacob, speaking of Joseph's sons, says, "In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh." (Gen. xlviii. 20.) And in Deut. xxiv. 13, where charge is given to deliver the poor man's pledge before the going down of the sun, a reason is added: "That

* *Ευλογείτε*, *Hebraica phrasis pro, Bene precamini, vel, Beneficio afficite: alioquin ευλογειν idem valet quod επαινειν, laudare.*—BEZA. "The word 'Bless' is a Hebrew expression, signifying, 'Wish well to,' or, 'Treat with kindness:' it also has the same meaning with the Greek word denoting 'to praise.'"—EDIT.

he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee ;” that is, “that he may find in his heart to pray to God for a blessing upon thee.”

(3.) *By speaking well of others, and praising them.*—So the wicked is said to “bless the covetous ;” (Psalm x. 3 ;) that is, to commend him for a wise man, that will “look,” as they say, “to the main chance.” And so it falls in with that in Psalm xlix. 18 : “Men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself.”

(1.) First, then, we ought to endeavour to “overcome evil” in others *by doing all offices of love and kindness to them, in the capacity wherein we stand, according to our power.*—Are friends unkind or injurious to us? We should not withdraw kindness from them, but be kind still.* Do our relations not perform the duties of their place? We should be the more careful to perform all the duties of ours to them. Have we to deal with enemies, that would do us all the mischief that lies in their power? We should not do as they would do to us ; but, on the contrary, be beneficial to them in any thing we may. “If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink :” (Rom. xii. 20 :) these expressions carry more in them than a little bread and drink.† When God is said to “make his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and to send rain on the just and on the unjust ;” (Matt. v. 45 ;) more is meant than the mere shining of the sun and the descending of the rain upon them. All earthly comforts which are produced by the sun’s influence and the fructifying virtue of the rain, are comprehended in them. So, when you ask of God “daily bread,” in asking that, you ask all other necessaries for your life. In like manner, when God says, “Give bread and drink,” he intends any thing else that may do them good. Thus did Joseph deal to his brethren, who had been very injurious to him. When, by the providence of God, he came to such an estate that he was able to do them good, he not only gave them bread in their hunger, but “nourished and comforted them,” and was a shelter to them in a strange land, as long as he lived. (Gen. l. 21.)

As we should do them all the good we can, so we ought to prevent any evil that might fall upon them. Saul had been very defective in his duty to David, both as a prince and a father. As a *prince*, he ought not only to have protected, but rewarded, so deserving a subject : as a *father*, he ought to have cherished such an obedient son, who “went out whithersoever Saul sent him.” (1 Sam. xviii. 5.) But, on the contrary, he not only encourages some of his followers to kill him, but endeavours to take away his life by his own hand. (1 Sam. xix. 1, 10.) Now how doth David carry it in this case? He endeavours to save himself as well as he could, by withdrawing, and giving place to Saul’s wrath ; and when he, in pursuing after him,

* *Est illa obliquæ talionis forma, ubi ab iis qui nos læserunt beneficentiam avertimus.*—CALVINUS. “That is an indirect mode of retaliation, when we cease from all acts of kindness toward them who have injured us.”—EDIT. † *Jurisperiti, cui victus testamento legatus est, ei intelligunt vestitum, habitationem, lectum, medicinas, et alia similia legata esse.*—PETRUS MARTYR. “When ‘sustenance’ is left to any man by a will, the lawyers understand that clothing, habitation, bed, medicine, and other things of the same kind, have also been bequeathed to him.”—EDIT.

falls into his hands more than once, he doth not only not destroy him himself, but withhold those that would. (1 Sam. xxiv. 6, 7; xxvi. 8, 9.) The tenderness that was in him toward such an enraged enemy appeared in this,—that his “heart smote him” but for cutting off the skirt of his garment; though this was done only to show that he was in his power, and that he could have done him a mischief if he would. What effect this had upon Saul, may be seen in the story. When David showed him the skirt of his garment, and spake a few words to show his innocency, he, though a king and mightily enraged against him, is melted into tears: “Saul lifted up his voice, and wept,” saying, “Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.” (1 Sam. xxiv. 5, 16, 17.)

There is nothing likely to overcome the rough temper and rugged carriage of others sooner than a kind and gentle behaviour toward them. When Paul came first to Thessalonica, he found them, or, at least, many among them, to be a rough and untractable people. The Bereans are said to be “more noble,” (Acts xvii. 11,) *ευγενεστεροι*, “of better breeding and more ingenuous,”* than they who, upon Paul’s preaching there, “took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar. (Verse 5.) Hence it is that he saith, that at his entrance in unto them, he “spake the gospel of God with much contention;” that is, on their part: for, as for his own part, he was otherwise disposed. (1 Thess. ii. 1, 2.) It was the rule [which] he gave to Timothy: “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.” (2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.) This was his own practice at this time: for, he says, “We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children.” (1 Thess. ii. 7.) As a nurse bears with the frowardness and peevishness of children, and, by all ways imaginable, endeavours to quiet them and bring them to a good humour; so did the apostle with them. And it is probable that those of them that did believe, partly by the apostle’s doctrine and partly by his example, were of the like disposition and carriage toward them that believed not. And what the effect of this was, in that place where the gospel was so much opposed at first, we may gather from what he says in his second epistle to them: “Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you.” (2 Thess. iii. 1.)

(2.) As we should do them all the good we can, and prevent the evil that might hurt them; so we ought to *pray that God would do them the good, and prevent the evil, [which] we cannot.*—“Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” (Matt. v. 44.) And if for such, much more for such who, though they may be in some particular instances prejudicial to us, have a love to and kind-

* *Constat apud Græcos translative tunc ευγενειαν ad mores et ad animum accommodari.*—BEZA. “It is evident that among Greek writers the word ‘nobility’ is used negligently, as relating either to the mind or to the manners.”—EDIT.

ness for us. David complains that his "soul was among lions," and that he did "lie among them that were set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth were spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." (Psalm lvii. 4.) And of these, or such as these, he says, "They did tear me, and ceased not." (Psalm xxxv. 15.) What did David now? Did he rend and tear, as they did? No: "As for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom." (Verse 13.) What could he have done more for his nearest friend or dearest brother? So he says, "I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother." (Verse 14.) Take an instance also of what was done for friends, who in a day of temptation did not the good [that] they should. When Paul came to Rome, he preached the gospel among them for two whole years together. (Acts xxviii. 30, 31.) And no doubt but that he that was "sure that, when he came, he should come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ," (Rom. xv. 29,) was kindly received by them. And we may well think that he who, before he came to them, did so earnestly "beseech them, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, to strive together with him in prayers to God, that he might be delivered from them that did not believe in Judea," (verses 30, 31,) did confidently expect that they would use not only that, but other good means, that he might "be delivered from them that did not believe" at Rome. But it fell out otherwise; for, when a day of trial came, these Romans' faith did so far fail that not a man of them stood by him, when he was in that great danger to be devoured by "the mouth of the lion:" "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me." This must needs greatly affect and afflict him; yet in the next words he prays that this sin might not be imputed to them: "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." (2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.) You see, this is the will of God, and this hath been the saints' practice.

But if you find holy men, as sometimes you may David and Paul, (Psalm lix. 13; 2 Tim. iv. 14,) uttering themselves in another manner against God's and their enemies, as if they desired evil to fall upon them; either the evil was temporal or eternal.

(i.) If the evil were *temporal*, they cannot be thought to desire it absolutely, *sub ratione mali*, "as evil;" but as it had a tendency to their good.* As David: "Put them in fear, O Lord: that the nations may know themselves to be but men." (Psalm ix. 20.) They desired evil no otherwise than good men, that are in place of authority over others, may and ought to use it; namely, not to make others *pœnâ miseris, sed correctione beatis*, "miserable by putting them to pain, but happy by amendment."

(ii.) If you find them sometimes to have a farther reach, and to

* *Deliberata imprecatio mali sub ratione mali contra homines, quæ est formalis maledictio, non potest non esse mala.*—AMÆSIUS *De Conscientiâ*, lib. iv. AUGUSTINUS *De Serm. Dom. in Monte*. "A deliberate imprecation of evil, *as evil*, upon men, which is a formal malediction, cannot but be wicked."—EDIT.

look beyond time, to *eternity*; you must consider, they were extraordinary persons, and by the spirit of prophecy did foresee what God had irrevocably determined concerning some men; and upon this supposition they might not only acquiesce in the judgment of God against them, but were obliged to approve of it, too; as all the saints shall at the last day approve of the sentence of Christ against such as they loved and earnestly prayed for, when here on earth, before they knew what their final state would be. That these had such a foresight, is plain by what David spake of Judas many years before he was born. He saw plainly what Judas's cursed end would be, as you may see by reading Psalm cix.; "which," Peter tells us, "the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas." (Acts i. 16.) So that these, being persons and cases extraordinary, are not to be drawn into example by ordinary persons.

It is good for us to mind what Christ says of great sinners: "I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." (Matt. xii. 31, 32.) When Christ says, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men," and excepts none but "the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost;" no, not a word spoken "against the Son of man" himself;—we may well think, a word spoken or a deed done against ourselves may be pardoned; and, that it may be so, should pray for it; and we may hope for a good effect of it. Stephen's prayer, when he was stoned, probably had an influence on Paul's conversion. (Acts vii. 60.) St. John tells us, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death." (1 John v. 16.) So that, unless a man could be assured that another hath sinned that "sin which is unto death," he may, nay, he ought to, pray for him: "He shall ask," &c.

In any case where there is but an "If so be," or a "Who can tell?" or a "Perhaps," there is room left for prayer. In that mighty tempest that arose in the sea to arrest Jonah as he was going to Tarshish, which was likely to have broken the ship, he is called on to "arise, and call upon his God, *if so be* that God will think upon us, that we perish not." (Jonah i. 6.) Their case was very doubtful; yet they pray. So, when Jonah had delivered his message to the Ninevites, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown;" they "cry mightily unto God," saying, "*Who can tell if* God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" (Jonah iii. 4, 8, 9.) Simon Magus was in a very bad state,—"in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity;" and Peter perceived it: yet he bids him "repent and pray, *if perhaps* the thought of his heart might be forgiven him."* And can we think, that he who put him upon praying for himself, would not pray for him, too; especially considering [that] Simon requested it of him? (Acts viii. 21—24.)

(3.) The third good means to be used to "overcome evil" in others, is to *use good words in speaking*, (i.) *Of them*; (ii.) *To them*.

* *Si fieri possit, ab ipsis inferis extrahendi nobis sunt homines.*—CALVINUS *in locum*.
"It is our duty to snatch men even from hell itself, if it be possible."—EDIT.

(i.) *To speak well of them so far as with truth we may.*—Peter Martyr thinks this is required, Rom. xii. 14: "Bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not." Where by "blessing," in the former part of the verse, he understands speaking well of them; in the latter, praying for them. But possibly the apostle might double the word only for the greater emphasis, it being a duty of great necessity, and not easy to be performed. However, it must be acknowledged a duty to speak well of them for what is praiseworthy in them. Indeed we may not "call evil good," nor praise any for the evil [that] they do; but must say in that case, as the apostle doth to the Corinthians, "Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not." (1 Cor. xi. 22.) On the other hand, we must not "call good evil." (Isai. v. 20.) There being none so bad but have some good gifts and commendable qualities in them, we should acknowledge them in them, and praise them for them. The positive part of the ninth commandment requires this at our hands,—to "bear" a true "witness" to our neighbour. Therefore, as Christ, when he blames this and the other church for the faults [which] he found in them, acknowledgeth the good he found among them, saying to one, "This thou hast," and to another, "This thou hast;" (Rev. ii. 6; iii. 4;) so should we do. And how this tends to overcome evil, the wise man will tell us: "As the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise;" (Prov. xxvii. 21;) or, as others, "so is to a man his praise;" that is, it tries him, and refines him, too.

(ii.) As good words of them tend to "overcome evil" in others, so *good words to them.*—Respectful language and modest answers are of great efficacy to allay and abate corrupt affections in others. It was spiritual wisdom in Paul to answer Festus—saying, he was mad and beside himself—calmly and respectfully: "I am not mad, most noble Festus." (Acts xxvi. 25.) With what respect and reverence doth David speak of and to Saul, when he was pursuing him for his life! Speaking of him, he calls him "the Lord's anointed;" (1 Sam. xxvi. 16;) and speaking to him, he doth, as it were, in one breath (for it is within the compass of the three following verses) call him, "My lord the king." And what he spake as well as what he did at that time, did for the present mollify his heart toward him, as appears by his saying to him again: "Is this thy voice, my son David?" (Verses 17—19.) "By long forbearing a prince is persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone." (Prov. xxv. 15.) A flint is sooner broken on a pillow than on a rock. We find the men of Ephraim very angry with Gideon, because he called them not, when he went out against the Midianites: for, the text saith, "They did chide with him sharply." He, though a "mighty man of valour," gave them this modest answer, "What have I now done in comparison of you? Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer?" intimating that they had done greater service in pursuing, than he had done in routing, of them. "Then," says the text, "their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that." (Judges viii. 1—3.) "Grievous words" might

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have "stirred up anger;" but his "soft answer turned away wrath."
(Prov. xv. 1.)

3. The third thing proposed was, to show *the manner how all this good must be done, that it may be the more effectual.*—It must be done,

(1.) *Cordially.*—What you do, must be done as in the presence of Him by whom "actions are weighed." (1 Sam. ii. 3.) Your prayers must not come "out of feigned lips." (Psalm xvii. 1.) What you speak must be "as in the sight of God." (2 Cor. ii. 17.) It is easy to use a few complimentary words in speaking to men, or a few vain words in speaking to God for them, as all are that come not from the heart. When you are about this work, you should endeavour to draw deep, even from the bottom of your hearts. Paul calls his prayer for the Jews, his greatest enemies, his "heart's desire." (Rom. x. 1.)

(2.) *Readily.*—Titus is charged to "put" Christians "in mind" of this: "To be ready to every good work." (Titus iii. 1.) Although these good works be contrary to corrupt nature, grace will make a man ready to them; the holiest men have been always the most forward in them. When God had set that mark of his displeasure on Miriam for chiding with Moses, how ready was he to pray for her! "Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee." (Num. xii. 13.) The Jews, before the captivity, were grown to a height of wickedness: "They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets," (2 Chron. xxxvi. 16.) and, among the rest, Jeremiah in particular, who was sent to tell them of the approaching captivity. Yet he was far from desiring that evil to overtake them, though they said, "Where is the word of the Lord? Let it come now." (Jer. xvii. 15.) He appeals to God in the next verse, that he had not "desired the woful day." He was so far from that, that he prayed hard for that hard-hearted people. How his heart stood this way, you may see by God's telling him again and again that he should not pray for them: "Pray not thou for this people;" (Jer. vii. 16;) so again, (xi. 14,) and once more; (xiv. 11;) till He tells him at last, [that] "though Moses and Samuel stood before" him, yet his "mind could not be toward that people." (xv. 1.)

Such an admirable readiness was found in the man of God against whom Jeroboam stretched out his hand, saying, "Lay hold on him," for his crying in the name of the Lord against his idolatrous altar at Bethel. God had dried up that hand which he stretched forth against the prophet; which brought him to entreat the man of God to pray for him. "And the man of God besought the Lord, and the king's hand was restored again, and became as it was before." (1 Kings xiii. 1—6.)

(3.) *Constantly.*—It is not enough to use these means once or twice for a fit, or when you are in a better frame than ordinary; but it must be your constant course. You find that, when your bodies are full of evil humours, the use of a good medicine once or twice

doth not remove your distemper ; therefore you steer to a course of physic. So must you do to remove or alter the tough humours that may be in others ; you must use the means constantly. There must not only be a "well-doing," but a "patient continuance in" it. (Rom. ii. 7.) If you find no good effect for a while, "be not weary in well-doing." (Gal. vi. 9.) "Say not thou, I will recompense evil ; but wait on the Lord." (Prov. xx. 22.) Thus did David for a long time, when Saul was his enemy ; he "waited on the Lord," and kept his way, though he was put to many a hard shift the while. And God put a sweet song into his mouth at last, when he had "delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul : " "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness ; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God." (Psalm xviii. 20, 21.)

USES.

USE I. *If these things be so, have we not cause to take up a lamentation, when we see men, professing themselves Christians, make so little account of such duties as Christ hath by precept enjoined, and by example led them to?*—How unsuitable to Christian doctrine is the practice of such as cannot, or will not, forgive the least injury ! This is far from endeavouring to "overcome evil with good." How can such say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us ?" Some of old are said to leave out these words, "As we forgive," &c. ; fearing, it is like, that doom, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant." (Luke xix. 22.) If any be more hardy in our days, they may know one day that God will not be mocked. (Gal. vi. 7.)

Nor is this all : are there not some that account it necessary to avenge themselves for a small offence,—it may be, only for a word,—though to the hazarding, nay, the loss, of their own and others' blood ? And to do thus, is by many accounted to be of a brave spirit ; and he that will not do so, is by some not thought worthy of the name of a "gentleman ;" as if the name were allied to *Gentilism*, rather than *gentleness*. Indeed, a learned divine, speaking of this matter, saith, "'Gentility,' according to the vulgar and most plausible notion, retains the substance of *Gentilism*, with a light tincture of Christianity."* But the learned and pious Bishop Davenant, speaking of the same, says, *Hæc opinio est plusquam ethnica* : "This opinion is more than heathenish." For several heathen philosophers have given better counsel in the case than these Christian gentlemen think fit to take ; and if it be more than heathenish, think what it must be ! † There are others, and too many, too, who—although they

* DR. JACKSON "Of Justifying Faith," chap. 13, parag. 8, 9. † *Est illa diabolica opinio, quæ invasit mentes omnium ferè qui se generosos somniant ; nimirum, non posse se, salvo suo honore et nominis sui existimatione, ferre vel verbum contumeliosum, sed teneri ad ultionem quærendam etiam duello.*—DAVENANTIIUS in Col. iii. "It is a diabolical opinion which has seized the minds of those who fancy themselves brave and noble ; to wit, that they cannot, without injury to their honour and good fame, bear even an abusive word, but are bound to require satisfaction even by a duel."—EDIT.

dare not go about to wrest the sword of vengeance out of the hand of God, who says, "Vengeance is mine," (Rom. xii. 19,) to commit so great an evil as is the fore-mentioned—yet they will be adventuring to "shoot their arrows, even bitter words," (Psalm lxiv. 3,) against such as do in the least offend them, or stand in their way. And, O that we could say that such as make a greater profession than others, and are in most things of good and exemplary conversations, were altogether free in this matter! But this evil is epidemical; and the best, I fear, are too much infected with it. The sad consequences of this we partly see already, and may see more in time, if God in mercy prevent them not. So that it is for "a lamentation," and likely to "be for a lamentation." (Ezek. xix. 14.)

USE II. *Look about you, and take heed that you be not overcome of evil.*

1. Let not *imaginary* evils "overcome" you; as they will be likely to do, as well as those that are real, if they be so apprehended. There is no observing man but may see what mischief hath come heretofore, and doth come every day, by such. There always have been, and still are, some who, being weak or malicious, do go about telling stories of this and that man or party; and by leaving out or putting into their tale some circumstances, or by setting an emphasis upon a word innocently spoken, do raise in others the highest passions, which hurry them away to speak and do things very sinful and unjust. If Doeg had fairly represented the matter of Ahimelech to Saul, there would have been found such circumstances in the case as might probably have excused him in Saul's own judgment, and have kept him from that barbarous act of slaying so many innocent souls. (1 Sam. xxii. 9—19.)

If David, upon hearing what Ziba had told him of Mephibosheth, had stayed awhile, and heard what he could have said for himself, he would not so soon have forgotten the "passing love" of Jonathan his father, (2 Sam. i. 26,) nor the oath [that] he made to him, "not to cut off kindness from his house for ever." (1 Sam. xx. 15.) But being then in such circumstances as made him credulous, upon a feigned story, without more ado, he presently gave away all that belonged to poor Mephibosheth to that false man. (2 Sam. xvi. 4.) And how many that are, or would easily be made, very good friends, are separated, or kept at a distance at this day, by such means as these, he is a stranger to the world that doth not see.

2. If the evil be *real*, yet "be not overcome" by it. It may be [that] it is not so great as it is apprehended: but if it be, it may be [that] the author of it did not think it would prove so offensive and hard to be borne as you find it to be; and then it would be a greater evil in you to return that to another which you find so hard to be borne yourself.

Christians should be more ready to receive one injury after another, than to return one for another. This I take to be the meaning of Christ, when he says, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matt. v. 39.) Julian the Apos-

tate did blasphemously object against Christ, that he did not observe his own laws; because, when he was smitten by one of the offenders with the palm of his hand, he did not turn the other cheek, but did expostulate with him that did it in these words: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" (John xviii. 23.) But Christ is the best Interpreter of his own laws, and by his practice hath told us what his meaning was in this. He was so far from avenging himself by word or deed, that he was ready and prepared to suffer farther at their hands; so as not only to be smitten again, but to be crucified. And in this he is proposed to us as an Example: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." (1 Peter ii. 21, 22.)

OBJECTION. "Will not such as are injurious grow more insolent, and go from bad to worse, if they be not dealt withal in their own kind?"

ANSWER 1. If any have humanity or ingenuousness in them, they will be ashamed by your forbearing of them: if they be void of these, they will be more irritated and provoked by rendering evil for their evil; and, consequently, you are likely to endure more from them.

2. If they should go from bad to worse, yet you may "not avenge yourselves:" (Rom. xii. 19:) this were to take upon you to be judges in your own case. God hath set up the ordinance of magistracy for this purpose: "He is a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." (Rom. xiii. 4.) Therefore in greater injuries you are to make application to him for a compensation; as Paul appealed to Cæsar. (Acts xxv. 11.)

3. Although a private person may not avenge himself, yet, in case he be assaulted by another that would take away his life, if no magistrate be at hand, he may stand upon his own defence by the law of nature, which Christ came not to destroy; provided that he endeavour to avoid his adversary by flying, if he may. (2 Sam. iii. 33, 34.) But if he press so hard upon him that he cannot, he may defend himself; wherein he should be as willing to save the other's life as to preserve his own.

4. God himself, when other means fail, doth often appear, to vindicate the wrongs of such as suffer with meekness and patience. He will not stand-by as one unconcerned, especially if his name be interested in the matter. When Rabshakeh came against Jerusalem, he made a railing oration to the people, threatening what he would do: but they "answer him not a word;" for the king had said, "Answer him not." (Isai. xxxvi. 21.) A while after, Hezekiah himself receives a letter, stuffed with the like railing matter. He reads it, but turns from the messenger, and goes to the house of God, and, "spreading the letter before the Lord," leaves the matter with him. (Isai. xxxvii. 14.) "Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand." (Verse 36.)

God commanded Jeremiah to put a yoke upon his neck, as a sign that the Jews should be brought under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar. (Jer. xxvii. 2, 12.) Hananiah, a false prophet, comes and takes the yoke off his neck, and breaks it before his face. (Jer. xxviii. 10.) What doth the good prophet do the while? Doth he strive with him about the yoke, that he might not break it? Or doth he use any unbecoming words, when he had done it? No; it is said, "Jeremiah went his way." (Verse 11.) But God sent him to Hananiah with this message,—that for his "rebellion" he should die that year; which accordingly came to pass in the seventh month. (Verses 12—17.)

Christians that would keep a due decorum in their words and actions when they are injured, should look well to their hearts, and keep them with diligence; for all sinful miscarriages begin there. When the heart is disordered by corrupt affections, the tongue and other members will hardly be kept in any good order. Therefore the apostle, willing the Colossians to put off the evil of the tongue, "blasphemy," which is "evil-speaking," bids them first put off the evils of the heart, "anger" and "malice." (Col. iii. 8.) Whether the heart be "inditing a good" or a bad "matter," the tongue will be as "the pen of a ready writer." (Psalm xlv. 1.) If cholera be suffered to boil to a height in the heart, the scum will be like to run over at the mouth.* If the heart be as "the troubled sea," which "cannot rest;" it will be casting out the "mire and dirt" which before lay at the bottom. (Isai. lvii. 20.) The evil of the heart is usually vented first at the mouth;† but it will soon appear in the other members. When once the "mouth is full of cursing and bitterness," the "feet" will be "swift to shed blood," till "destruction and misery be in men's ways." (Rom. iii. 14—16.) He that will not be "overcome of evil," must take care to rule his own spirit: "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls;" (Prov. xxv. 28;) easily overcome. Nothing can conduce more to the calming of our spirits, when they begin to rise against such as are offensive to us, than to consider how obnoxious we have been and still are to the great God. (Psalm ciii. 10; cxxx. 3.) David's patience toward Shimei was admirable, when he cast stones at him and cursed him still as he went. No doubt, the consideration of the sins whereby he had provoked God, made him the more calm toward that vile wretch. (2 Sam. xvi. 6—10.)

USE III. *Rest not in this,—that you are not overcome of evil; but endeavour, as much as you can, to overcome evil with good.*—Do not your relations perform the duties of their place to you? Be you the more circumspect and diligent to perform the duty of yours to them. Are neighbours unkind to you? Let the law of kindness be in your

* *Cor felle livoris amarum per linguæ instrumentum spargere nisi amara non potest.*—BERNARDUS. "A heart that is bitter with the gall of malice, cannot utter, by means of the tongue, aught but what is bitter."—EDIT. † *Nullum vindictæ genus tam in promptu habet, quàm hoc maledicendi.*—DAVENANTIUS. "No kind of revenge is so ready, as this of cursing."—EDIT.

mouth, and acts of kindness in your hands, to them. Do any hate you? Let your love work to overcome that hatred.*

1. *Keep your hearts in a constant awe of God commanding you.*—When they draw back, as they will be apt to do, think of God standing by you, and saying, “Have not I commanded you?” (Joshua i. 9.) If others make no great matter of sinning against God, do you say, as Nehemiah, “But so will not I, because of the fear of God.” (Neh. v. 15.) This was it that kept Samuel to the duty of praying for a people that had dealt very unworthily by him. “As for me,” says he, “God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.” (1 Sam. xii. 23.)

2. *Have much and often in your eye the great example of all goodness,—Christ, whose name you bear.*—He met with a great deal of evil from an unthankful world; yet he “went about doing good” still. (Acts x. 38.) How kind was he in word and deed to his greatest enemies to the very last! When Judas came to betray him, the worst word [that] he gave him was, *Friend*: “Friend, wherefore art thou come?” (Matt. xxvi. 50.) And when Peter, in zeal for his Master’s safety, had drawn, and cut off the ear of one of the officers that came to take him, “he touched his ear, and healed him.” (Luke xxii. 51.) “Consider Him,” therefore, “that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” (Heb. xii. 3.) If He whom you call “Lord and Master” did thus, should not you do so much rather? (John xiii. 14.)

To further you in this work, take these few considerations.

1. *By doing thus, you will show yourselves to be genuine Christians and truly spiritual.*—To “render evil for evil,” is “devilish;” (James iii. 14, 15;) *good for good*, something human, but no more than publicans used to do: but to render *good for evil*,—that is Christian: “What do ye more than others?” (Matt. v. 43—48.) “The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness.” (Eph. v. 9.) If, then, there be found in you such fruits of the Spirit as are mentioned, Gal. v. 22,—“Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,”—it will be a token that the good Spirit of Christ is in you.

2. *It will tend very much to the amplifying of the kingdom of Christ, and the bettering of the world.*—One great reason why Christianity hath made no greater progress in the world in latter times is, because Christians have not been so much conversant in this duty as they were in the primitive times.† The rendering evil for evil makes *the world* a doleful place; *a house*, a Bedlam for fury and disorder; *a city*, a wilderness for rapine and confusion; *a kingdom*, “a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof,” as was said of that, Num. xiii. 32. But to render good for evil tends to make the world

* *Vis ut ameris? Ama.* “Love, if thou wishest to be loved.”—EDIT. † *Hæc illa virtus est quæ primitiva ecclesia excelluit, ac crevit ferendo, non resistendo; ad hanc quia redditus sumus inhabiles, res Christianismi in deterius ruunt indies.*—ARETIUS. “This is that virtue in which the primitive church excelled, and increased by suffering, but not by resisting: in consequence of our unskilfulness in this duty, the interests of Christianity are falling daily into a worse condition.”—EDIT.

a peaceable habitation, where God and men may delight to dwell. If this duty were more practised, "the wolf" would sooner "dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid;" as is prophesied, Isai. xi. 6.

3. *It is a sign that God hath more blessings in store, when he hath given a man a heart to perform this duty.* (2 Cor. xiii. 11.)—His "labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. xv. 58.) Beside the eternal reward in heaven, God doth usually give a temporal reward on earth. There is this encouragement given to afford bread to a hungry enemy,—that God will "reward" it. (Prov. xxv. 21, 22.) Saul was "among the prophets" when he presaged good to David for not suffering him to be hurt, when his spear was taken from him, while he lay sleeping: "Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail." (1 Sam. xxvi. 25.) It hath been observed, that such children as have been, without cause, discouraged by their parents, so as not to have a like share in their favour, nor a portion of their substance with the rest, and yet have continued every way dutiful to them, have been blessed by God above the rest; and such servants as have had hard and froward masters, and yet have continued diligent and faithful in their service, have been wonderfully prospered when they have set up for themselves.

4. *This is the most glorious way of overcoming others.*—It is God's and Christ's way: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." (Hosea xi. 4.) What glory would it be to a man, that it should be said of him, (as Psalm ix. 6,) "Thou hast destroyed cities," if he himself be in the mean time destroyed by his own lusts? "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city."* (Prov. xvi. 32.)

5. *Hereby you will keep a sweet serenity in your own spirits.*—There is not only "glory and honour," but "peace, to every one that worketh good." (Rom. ii. 10.) How was David transported with joy, when Abigail had been a means of keeping him from avenging himself with his own hand on Nabal and his house! His mouth was full of blessings: he blesseth the Lord God of Israel that sent her; he blesseth her, and blesseth her advice. (1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.) Much more joy will flow in upon you, if you go farther, and "overcome evil with good." You will bless God heartily, who hath enabled you, against all temptations and your own natural inclinations to the contrary, to perform this excellent and most Christian duty, when you find in yourselves the joy that will attend it.

* Ἐαυτον νικων μεγαυστη νικη.—ΠΛΑΤΟ. "To conquer one's self is the greatest victory."—EDIT.